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50 years of Earth observation: The contribution to sustainable development goals and plans for the future
(6)

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CHARTER

Abstract

The extraordinary activation of the Disasters Charter in 2014 to address the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone and Guinea; the use of satellite imagery by UNESCO to catalogue the destruction of international cultural heritage by ISIS; the monitoring by UNOSAT of peoples displaced by war in Syria and Somali; the use of the UN-SPIDER for drought monitoring and water management –Earth observation has come a long way from its Cold War, geospatial intelligence roots. These cooperative efforts began with the Disaster Charter, whose idea was first suggested by the European Space Agency at the 1999 UNISPACE III Conference. The purpose of the Charter is to promote “cooperation between space agencies and space system operators in the use of space facilities as a contribution to the management of crises arising from natural or technological disasters.” And it has been quite successful.

Today, it is incontrovertible that Earth observation assets and capabilities are key to the achievement of many – if not all – of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This paper will analyze the human and environmental benefits achieved by the Disaster Charter and other cooperative arrangements. It will illustrate the valuable role of coordination mechanisms at the international level and their relationship to binding international norms, on the one hand, and domestic implementation, on the other. Using the Disaster Charter as a model, the paper will introduce the concept of an Economic Development Charter. It will review each SDG and discuss how Earth observation can accelerate the accomplishment of each mission. Indeed, in some instances, the authors argue that certain goals simply will not be met without harnessing space capabilities. To this end, the paper suggests that poverty, hunger and many of the other targets of the SDGs are current and ongoing disasters. The paper will introduce a model for an Economic Development Charter that will afford developing nations access to remote sensing data to achieve critical infrastructure and other goals that will ultimately help the entire international community complete the SDG mission. The research for this paper was conducted at the University of Mississippi School of Law and includes contributions by students involved in a class devoted entirely to the law of remote sensing.